

Survivor by Maya R. Hughes

It feels like I've been walking for years.
Centuries, even.
And yet it's only been five months since I left to find my sister.

I glance down at my compass, confirming that I'm still heading north. The red arrow points to top right corner, and wobbles slightly as I move forward. A long crack extends across the screen, and the glass is chipped on the sides. This compass has stayed with me for five months - probably for the rest of my life.

It's funny how you can remember so little yet so much all at once. I don't remember my second birthday, or my first day of school outfit. But I do remember my favourite poem, *Stopping by woods on a snowy evening* By Robert Frost.

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

I think that poem is a good recap of the last five months - especially the last paragraph. *The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.*

I remember the moment I found out that my mother had died, and how the cops gave me my sister's ball cap and said that she had most likely fallen off the cliff edge after my mother. But she hadn't. She *couldn't*. If that hat was at the top of the cliff, than so was she. I just have to prove it.

I hear a faint sound, and screech to a halt. The breeze rustles my thick, black hair as I wait, listening.
Hoping for a sign that I'm almost there.

That I'm not alone.

And then I hear it again. A call for help. I sprint toward the noise, dropping my compass as I run. It doesn't matter anymore.

Nothing matters anymore.

I stop in a clearing, listening again for another cry. Eighty-foot tall spruce trees surround me as I chew my bottom lip in silence.

"Ella?" I call out into the woods. "Ella??" I call again, pleading that my sister is out there somewhere, waiting for me to find her. Another faint cry propels me forward.

"Ella!" I call over and over. And whenever I call her name, the cry echoes back mine.

"Kiana! Kiana! Kiana!"

I sprint until my legs ache, and yell until my lungs hurt. The cry becomes louder and louder as I chase it through the forest, my heart pounding against my rib cage.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.

Finally I round the corner, and there I see her. Curled in a ball, her back leaning against a tree trunk, is my sister. My heart stops at the sight of her - her pale skin, long, brown hair, and rosy cheeks.

"Ella!" I almost shout as I dash toward her, wrapping her in my arms. I feel her shaking breaths on my shoulder, and hear her heart beat in her chest.

But I have promises to keep.

She survived.

I survived.

I found her. She's safe.

And I don't want to lose her again. Not now; not ever. I am stronger now. And I won't give up.

And miles to go before I sleep,

And miles to go before I sleep.